

The Iron Works House: 1640s or 1680s?

Nutting, the First Iron Works Association, and local residents had long thought of the house as the Iron Master's House, built in the 1640s when the iron works started or built even earlier in the 1630s by Thomas Dexter, who owned the land prior to the iron works.

This notion changed in the 1970s when the eminent architectural historian Abbot Lowell Cummings determined the house to have been built in the early 1680s based on its architecture and deed information. The architecture of this framed house, including its substantial proportions, overhang, projected porch, and particularly the deep-set chimney and staircase, dated the house to the 1680s. This timeframe was supported by title documents from 1683, one of which states that Samuel Appleton, Jr., owned the property as a farm with a "mansion house." Appleton was born in Ipswich in 1654 to an Essex County magistrate, was grandson and nephew of the last owners of the iron works, and was an ancestor of William Sumner Appleton.

In 1999 core samples were taken from the main frame elements of the house. The tree rings were compared with those in the Parson Capen House and to a living stand of old oak forest. This evidence suggests a building date of 1688/89, a date that coincides with Appleton's sale of the property to James Taylor.

Although this 1680s house is not directly connected with the operation of the iron works, it is an excellent example of an early Colonial American house built by the gentry, and it played a key part of the restoration of the iron works fifty years ago.



The Iron Works House, Saugus Iron Works NHS, 2003

All photographs are courtesy of the National Park Service.

For further reading:

Burdick, Kim. "Louise's Legacy" in *Delaware Today*, June 2000.

Denenberg, Thomas Andrew. *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America*. New Haven and London, England: Yale University Press, 2003.

MacKeil, Louis M. *Wallace Nutting*. Saugus, MA: Saugus Historical Society, 1984.

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Saugus Iron Works National Historic Site
Saugus, Massachusetts

Wallace Nutting, the Iron Works House, and the Preservation Movement in Essex County



Wallace Nutting

Wallace Nutting, a minister, antiquarian, photographer, author, and businessman, was part of the preservation movement of the early twentieth century in New England. He focused on his photography business after leaving the ministry in 1904, purchased and restored houses for photographic backdrops, established a reproduction furniture business by 1917, and wrote numerous books and articles. All of these enterprises focused on the portrayal of early colonial America.

Wallace Nutting and the Iron Works House

William Sumner Appleton, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA, now called Historic New England), urged Wallace Nutting to purchase and restore the Iron Works House in Saugus, MA. Nutting did so in 1915.

Since the house had had many owners over the years and had been a tenement for workers in the nearby mills, it had gone through many changes by the late nineteenth century. To return the house to its “original form,” major restoration was needed.



The Iron Works House in 1915.

Nutting worked with historical architect Henry Charles Dean on the restoration. Nutting also hired Edward Guy, a master blacksmith from Newburyport, for all the ironwork needed on house restoration and as caretaker.



The Iron Works House after restoration.

Nutting named the house “Broadhearth” because of its big fireplace hearths. This restoration was the first of five that Nutting would refer to as his “Chain of Colonial Picture Houses.” Two of the other houses were also in Essex County.

Chain of Colonial Picture Houses:

- * Broadhearth (The Iron Works House) Saugus, MA
- * Cutler- Bartlett House Newburyport, MA
- * Hazen- Garrison House Haverhill, MA
- * Hospitality Hall (Joseph Webb House) Wethersfield, CT
- * Wentworth- Gardner House, Portsmouth, NH



Nutting used the houses as backdrops for photographs and to show and sell his reproduction furniture. In a Saugus mill building just north of the Iron Works House, Nutting set up shop for both the photography business and the reproduction furniture business. Young women were hired to color the photographs, and some of these women were also models in the photographs. Nutting used all of these elements – photography, furnishings, restored houses, and books and articles – to project his view of early colonial America. By the 1920s, Nutting’s commercial enterprises had a nationwide market.

The Iron Works House and the Preservation Movement

The early twentieth century saw a surge of house preservation efforts in New England. Driven by William Sumner Appleton, founder of SPNEA, many houses were preserved and restored. Other houses in Essex County of similar age and restoration include the Swett- Ilsley House in Newbury and the Boardman House in Saugus, with Henry Charles Dean as the supervising architect; the Parson Capen House in Topsfield, with George Frances Dow; and the Rebecca Nurse House in Danvers and the Turner- Ingersoll Mansion (The House of the Seven Gables) in Salem, with Joseph Everett Chandler as restoration architect.

The Iron Works House was an integral part of the restoration of the Iron Works site in the 1940s and 1950s. Students at the Henry Ford Trade School in Michigan purchased the house in 1941, with the intent of moving it to Dearborn, Michigan. This spurred the local community into action to keep the house in Saugus, and the First Iron Works Association was formed in 1943. Under that organization, the Iron Works House was saved, and further investigation of the site’s history ensued, with an archaeological dig and reconstruction of the main buildings in the early 1950s.

Louise du Pont Crowninshield, after already having furnished the Derby House in Salem and the Jeremiah Lee Mansion in Marblehead and participating in numerous preservation and philanthropic undertakings locally and nationwide, helped furnish the Iron Works House. She also was influential in getting the American Iron and Steel Institute’s interest and therefore financial support of the archaeological dig and reconstruction.